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SAVANNAH IN THE '40'S.

BY CHARLES H. OLMSTEAD.

Nothing gives clearer idea of the advance made by a community or state than a detailed recital of its condition in the more or less remote past.

The comparison between the limitations of one period and the expansion of a later day; between the quiet, sleepy, little town and the bustling, thronging city; between the sparsely settled country and the great commonwealth with its teeming population and varied industries, is always an absorbing subject for contemplation. Indeed, this it is that gives the charm to History. No part of "Macaulay's England" is more engrossing than that portion of his first chapter in which he so graphically describes what our old Motherland was in the days of which he wrote; what the manners and customs of the people, what their amusements, their occupations, their surroundings. Side by side with all this, place our knowledge of the great Empire of the present day, and we arrive at a comprehension of its history that the dry record of dynasties and wars, parliaments and ministerial changes—important though they all may be—could never by itself impart.

Reflections of this character have induced the writer to believe that a few reminiscences of Savannah as it was in his early boyhood may not prove uninteresting to the readers of the *Quarterly*. The city of today was then but little more than a town of very moderate proportions. According to the United States Census of 1840, its entire population amounted to only 11,214—of these, 5,888 were white and 5,326 colored. 632 of the colored people figured as "free persons of color," the remainder were slaves. The same census reported the population of the great city of New York as 312,710, and Boston 85,000.

In the U. S. Census of 1850 Savannah is put down for 15,312, an increase of 4,098 in 10 years, or, a little over 36½ per cent.—a fair indication of healthy growth.

The river marked the northern boundary of the city. On the east there was a fringe of houses beyond East Broad street and beyond them a grassy slope, (site of "The Trustee's Gardens" in Colonial times) and the remains of an old earth-work erected, I believe, during the war of 1812. This last gave the name of "The Fort" to the entire locality. A few industrial plants, a shipyard, sawmill, cotton press, etc., extended a little further down on the river front. The

Ogeechee Canal bounded the city on the west though the area built upon did not reach its banks; a broad common intervened, a grazing place for cattle and a favorite resort for ball-players—not the scientific baseball of the present day but a more modest game conducted, however, with the same amount of noisy enthusiasm. The section west of West Broad street was known then, as now, as “Yamacraw” and between the boys who lived there and those of “The Fort” there was bitter and ceaseless rivalry which not unfrequently resulted in black eyes and bloody noses. Beyond the canal there was nothing save very low land, partly cultivated, and marshes making in from the river. The splendid collection of railroad terminals, warehouses, mills and factories of one kind and another that now bear testimony to the city’s prosperity in that quarter, had then no existence. None of them were even dreamed of; he would have been called a visionary indeed who had ventured to predict them. On the south, Harris street was the limit in 1840 excepting in the eastern and western suburbs. I distinctly remember standing in 1846 or 7, at the corner of Oglethorpe Barracks, where the DeSoto Hotel now stands, and seeing no buildings south of me but two which had recently been erected, the residence of Mr. John N. Lewis on the S. W. corner of Bull and Charlton streets, and that of the Gallaudet on Jones street where the headquarters of the Y. M. C. A. were so long located in later years. Toward the south-east was the old county jail and its enclosed yard occupying ground on which the handsome Low and Cohen residences were afterwards built. From Harris street to Gaston the city common extended, a broad grassy stretch of land much frequented in the summer season by sportsmen for shooting night-hawks. At Gaston street the pine forest began and continued indefinitely to the south except where broken by a negro cemetery, and the stranger’s burial ground, situated, if memory serves me, just south-east of the City Hospital.

Running east and west through this forest and crossing Bull street near where the fountain now stands in Forsyth Park, was a very wide deep ditch dug to carry off surface drainage water to the lowlands lying to the eastward; the White Bluff road crossed this by a wooden bridge.

Reference has been made to the old jail; I can recall having been taken there by my nurse, when a very small boy, to carry some message she had been charged with, to a gentleman then imprisoned there for debt. There comes before me a dim recollection of a large room the door of which had to be unlocked to let us in. It was occupied by

eight or ten impecunious gentlemen, all more or less "*en dishabille*" all smoking pipes, and several of them busy with cards. It seems to have been the custom to release such prisoners on parole under certain circumstances and limitations. There stood in Wright Square, for a great many years, a stone bearing the cabalistic letters, "J. B." My youthful mind was long puzzled as to their meaning until told that they stood for "Jail Bounds," and that the stone marked the point beyond which the paroled might not pass.

There were many features about the old town that would seem queer to the present generation. For one, the fact that there was not a paved street throughout its length and breadth, while in some of them there were even no sidewalks. Every street was a bed of heavy sand through which wheeled vehicles had to plough their way as could best be done. With every high wind clouds of dust were stirred up to the great discomfort of pedestrians and of housekeepers. The first attempt to remedy this state of affairs was the building of a plank road from the Central Railroad depot down West Broad and Bay streets to the wharves beyond East Broad, thus connecting our only commercial feeder from the interior of the State with the shipping that was to carry away cotton and other products to northern ports and to Europe. This road was considered a great advance in civilization and there was an inclination among Savannahians to boast of it.

It did not last very long, however; exposure to the weather and the heavy traffic over the planks soon made a new road necessary and this time it was of cobble stones.

The water supply of the town was drawn entirely from wells. An old-fashioned wooden pump was located in each one of the public squares and at the intersection of the broader streets, such as Bull and Broughton. There were also wells in some private yards but to these the general public did not have access. It goes without saying that the water was more or less polluted by drainage from the surface and there can be no doubt that for a great many years this was a serious detriment to the health of the city and contributed largely to its reputation for sickness, a reputation that stuck to it long after the causes for it had been removed.

The lighting facilities were even more primitive; they consisted of a single oil lamp at each pump, "only this and nothing more." In these, whale oil was burned, the illuminating power of which was exceedingly limited; beyond a little circle around the pump there was Cimmerian darkness on

such nights as the moon did not happen to be shining. Looking back upon the manner in which those who lived in that day were supplied with these two necessities, water and light, it is difficult to understand how they got along, yet get along they did, and doubtless no less happily than those of us now who have all that modern science can give to meet those two great wants.

The communications of Savannah, by sea, with ports along the coast were fairly well kept up by steamboat lines to Charleston on the north and Darien, Brunswick, St. Mary's, Jacksonville, Palatka, etc., to the south. Sundry lines of sailing craft, barks and brigs mostly, furnished the only means of reaching New York by water, and they were freely patronized in the summer months by persons of leisure, seeking relief from the hot Southern climate. The names of some of these vessels will be remembered by our older citizens: The ship Hartford; barks Exact, Peter Demill and Isaac Mead; brigs Macon, Wilson Fuller, Philura, Excel, Augusta, etc.

They were staunch sea-going craft, well commanded and comfortably provided, but small affairs after all, the average being only about 330 tons. To Philadelphia there was a line of schooners averaging a little under 200 tons each.

In 1848 on resolution of the City Council, a census of the city was prepared by Mr. Joseph Bancroft, and published for general information. In this pamphlet the following announcement appears:

"The Steam Ship Packet Line,
Between Savannah and New York."

"Of this projected line, one ship is already launched and in process of completion, and will be on the route between this port and New York in September, and a second one is contracted for, to follow her, and will be ready in March next. The two will form a weekly communication next season. These ships are about 1200 tons each, unsurpassed in strength, in beauty of model and solidity of machinery. All the latest improvements will be in them which experience has suggested, and they will be entitled to succeed. They will cost \$170,000 each, and are partly owned in Savannah."

"Padelford & Fay, Agents in Savannah,
Samuel L. Mitchell, Agent in New York."

A steamer of 1200 tons does not seem a leviathan in these days, yet everything in this world is relative, and I doubt if any one of the great floating caravanseries with

which we are now familiar, ever received a more enthusiastic welcome at its port of arrival than did the wooden side wheel steamship Cherokee and her consort the Tennessee as, in accordance with the above prospectus, they sailed up the muddy waters of the Savannah. There was, on each occasion, a tremendous crowd on the wharf to meet the new boats, and a rush to get on board as soon as the gang plank was adjusted that was like a Caruso night at the Metropolitan Opera.

Mr. Bancroft's census gave some very interesting figures concerning shipments from the port during a series of years. From these we learn that the total exports of cotton were as follows:

In 1839.....	199,176	Bales
" 1840.....	284,249	"
" 1841.....	147,280	"
" 1842.....	222,234	"
" 1843.....	280,826	"
" 1844.....	244,575	"
" 1845.....	304,544	"
" 1846.....	186,306	"
" 1847.....	234,151	"

Comparing these figures with later ones, it will be seen that in 1913 the year before the outbreak of the present war, the exports of cotton from Savannah were as follows:

To foreign ports.....	1,121,780	Bales
Coastwise	586,912	"
Total.....	1,708,692	"

Under the heading "*Pauperism*," Mr. Bancroft had this to say, which is good reading for all who love the old city, and suggestive reading to any northern friends who may still regard our "peculiar institution" as "The sum of all the villainies." He says:

"On this subject, in published statistics of places, it is usual to give some particulars. In many cities of our country the subject is a fruitful and almost a frightful one. But Savannah is blessed in almost an exemption from this calamity of human nature, and little or nothing can be said of its misery."

"Under her peculiar institution her slaves are taken care of. The free blacks are generally in comfortable circumstances; and, for the relief of the poor and destitute whites

in her midst, institutions abound which charge themselves with alleviating their wants. A beggar is rarely seen in her streets, public charity is always ready, and private charity never lacketh."

The Fire Department of that day prided itself on efficiency and probably it would have borne favorable comparison with that of any one of the smaller cities of the United States. The Department proper was composed entirely of whites.

A Chief Fireman, two or three assistants and two officers for each engine company. I do not know whether these gentlemen were paid or not, but it is my impression that their services were entirely voluntary, a free-will offering to the public welfare.

There were some eight or ten fire engines, two or three hose carts and a hook-and-ladder truck, all of which were drawn and worked by hand power. Each engine was manned by a company of colored men in whom there was a great spirit of emulation and pride of organization. The company that reached a fire first was considered to bear the honors of the occasion, the individual members of the company not being slow or mealy-mouthed in giving expression to their appreciation of that fact. In working the brakes and in returning from fires the men invariably burst into song, as is the custom of the race whenever rhythmic effort is put forth, such as rowing, marching, etc. The engine houses were located in the public squares, and near most of them cisterns were dug and kept filled with water. These furnished the only supply, except where fires happened to occur sufficiently near the river for that limitless source to be drawn upon.

Alarms were given from the steeple of the Exchange building on Bay street where a watchman kept ward day and night, to sound the alarm by loud and rapid ringing of the great bell whenever smoke or flame in any quarter of the old town advised him that help was needed. That one man held the place now filled by a thorough and complex telegraphic system; in the not unsupposable case of his having fallen asleep, it will readily be seen that a fire might have gotten beyond control before the summoning of aid. When the Exchange bell spoke, officers and men of the various companies dropped their individual employments and made the quickest time possible to the engine houses but nothing could be done there until men enough had gathered to drag the heavy machine. The few first moments lost from this cause were worth hours afterwards.

The city was divided into four fire districts by the intersection of Bull street and Oglethorpe Avenue, (or South Broad street as it was then called) these were numbered respectively 1, 2, 3, and 4. Districts 1 and 2 were north of Oglethorpe Ave., 3 and 4 to the south of it, and when an alarm had been sounded, after a pause the watchman indicated the particular district in which the fire was occurring by so many distinct strokes of the bell. If, for instance, there were three of these the captains of the engine companies would know they were wanted somewhere east of Bull and south of Oglethorpe. This was a tolerably large area to search through, especially when it is considered that the men were dragging a heavy engine through sandy streets while uncertain as to just where was the scene of trouble. Still, the old department did its work and did it faithfully and well. Citizens could only compare it with similar organizations in other places and they found no cause for dissatisfaction in the comparison.

The military spirit of Savannah in the 40's as expressed by its volunteer organizations differed not at all from what it has always been from the first settlement of Oglethorpe's Colony down to the present time. Of the commands existing at that period several dated back to the early years of the century, and one as far back as 1786—only three years after the close of the Revolution. All of them served with honor in the Confederate Army and all, with but one exception, the Phoenix Riflemen, are still in vigorous life, in line to do their part in the great war that is upon the nation. That particular company expanded into a regiment—the 63rd Georgia—in 1862, laid down its arms with Gen. Joseph E. Johnston at Greensboro, N. C., in April, 1865, and was not subsequently re-formed. But one feature of the city's martial life has definitely passed away, the annual parade of the "unterrified" militia. Under the old State laws, every citizen between certain ages was called upon to perform military duty at least one day in the year, and the gathering of these warriors was surely a unique occasion—the Kaiser would turn gray could he see one now. The officers were duly commissioned by the State and paraded in the full uniform of the United States Army, but of the rank and file, so far as appearance went, the least said the better.

The town was divided into militia districts or "beats," as they were called, the boundaries and numbers of which were coincident with those of the Fire Districts. Within these limits all citizens of the prescribed age, who were not members of volunteer companies or other-

wise legally exempt, were summoned to appear at the arsenal on a specified day prepared to serve their country. In case of default the one summoned was further required to make satisfactory excuse before a magistrate's court or bear whatever fine "His Honor" might inflict. The companies bore the names of the beats from which they were drawn as 1st Beat, 2nd Beat, etc., and they paraded on separate days, except upon such occasions as when the entire brigade, (which included the volunteer commands) might happen to be ordered out by the Brigadier General. The arsenal stood on Whitaker street on the ground now occupied by the western end of the Post Office building—it was only pulled down a few years ago. On the upper floor were stored the arms and equipments provided by the State, but drawn originally from the Federal government. A sorry lot they were—old flint and steel muskets dating back at least as far as the war with Great Britain in 1812, some of them, perhaps, even longer. Bayonets and ramrods were missing from a great many, and a general air of antiquity was over them all. The equipments, belts, cartridge-boxes and bayonet scabbards, all more or less dilapidated, furnished fit complement to the wonderful army of ancient weapons. For the yard of the arsenal were three or four old siege guns, (two of which, I believe, now adorn the front of the Armory of the Savannah Volunteer Guards). It is impossible to say how long they had been there, but I remember observing that a good sized mulberry tree had grown up between the cheeks of the carriage of one of them. On parade days the men assembled outside the building, and when the doors were opened a general rush was made for the room where the arms were kept, and each man equipped himself for the day. The line was then formed on President street and the martial column proceeded to the south common to take in such portion of the Tactics of General Winfield Scott as its officers were able to impart. Crude and ludicrous as were these attempts at soldiering, they were far in advance of what took place all through the country districts on "Training Day," as one can readily see by reference to Judge Longstreet's "Georgia Scenes." An interesting and unique figure in those days was a genuine Revolutionary hero, Mr. Sheftall Sheftall, who lived in a wonder dwelling on the north side of Broughton street between Whitaker and Barnard. The old gentleman when a young man had served in the Continental Army with faithfulness and honor. To the end of life he clung to the costume of '76—the long coat, flapped waist-

coat, knee breeches, low quartered shoes with large silver buckles, and the cocked hat, which gave him the name by which he was generally spoken of—"Cocked Hat Sheftall." On any fine day he could be seen taking his constitutional up and down the long piazza that ran in front of the house, and report had it that so regular was he in this that he wore out two or three sets of flooring in his tramps. The old veteran passed away on August 15, 1847, and was escorted to his last resting place by all the military of the city on the following day.

Politics ran very high in those far off days; of course the colored people had no votes and the whites were nearly equally divided between the Whig and the Democratic parties. There was much bitterness of expression on both sides in every campaign and the vicinity of the court-house on each election day was the scene of many personal conflicts, but as everywhere else in our favored land, the white dove of peace always put in an appearance on the following morning. I was too young to have any memory of the Harrison presidential campaign though there comes to me a faint memory of a certain suit I wore adorned with log-cabin buttons, that being the distinctive badge of the Whig party in that famous contest.

The Whigs had their headquarters in a large two-story wooden building known as Lyceum Hall, and situated on the south-west corner of Bull and Broughton streets. The Democrats were more modestly housed on the corresponding corner of Barnard and Broughton. Lyceum Hall was a favorite place for public entertainments of one kind and another, a popularity which it shared with the long room of the City Exchange and with Oglethorpe Hall on Bryan street just across from the Merchants National Bank.

In 1844 Henry Clay visited Savannah by invitation. He arrived by the Central Railroad and was escorted from the depot to the house of the Hon. John McPherson Berrien, by a long cavalcade of gentlemen riding by twos. At every other corner or so the procession was stopped and the riders with bared heads gave three cheers for "Harry of the West," as Mr. Clay was affectionately called by his followers. Judge Berrien was a representative of Georgia in the United States Senate for many years, and held the office of Attorney General in the Cabinet of President Jackson. He was a gentleman of cultivated mind and polished manners; the honor and dignity of our old commonwealth were worthily sus-

tained by him in a body where sat some of the greatest men whom America has ever produced. His house is still standing on the north-west corner of Habersham and Broughton streets.

On the day after his arrival Mr. Clay addressed a large crowd of citizens from the balcony over the Bryan street entrance of the old Pulaski House. I was present upon the occasion, it being my habit at that period of life to see everything that was going on. Some three years afterwards I heard Daniel Webster speak from a platform erected around the Greene Monument in Johnson Square. It has ever been a satisfaction to me to have seen these two distinguished men. I have clear recollection of their personal appearance, but, of course, was not old enough to understand their speeches.

Many have been the changes in the old town since the days here written of, but none more marked than in the system of education for the young. Indeed there was no public system then, nor had a single one of the splendid school buildings been erected that now adorn the city. True, the old Chatham Academy was in existence, but only pay schools were conducted in it by private individuals, though the Academy itself was under control of a Board of Trustees. There were a number of private schools scattered here and there throughout the town but only one free school—it was located at the corner of Perry and Whitaker streets and the majority of its scholars were the boys of the Union Society.

The character of the private schools, however, was of a high order, and what was taught in them thoroughly taught. The curriculum had not the ambitious breadth and universality of the modern school course, yet it is doubtful whether the average pupil of today can claim to be so faithfully grounded in "the three R's," or in the basic work of English and classical education as were the boys and girls who studied under Henry K. and James Preston, Wm. T. Feay, Rev. George White, and others, their contemporaries.

Here then, may end this brief retrospect. It has been pleasant to look back upon the day of small things—to compare the Savannah of seventy or eighty years ago with the beautiful and thriving city that the industry, zeal and patriotism of its citizens have made it.

The contrast may well fill the heart with bright hope for the future.